



# The Florida House of Representatives

**Chris Sprowls**  
**Speaker**

## NEWS RELEASE

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## **House Speaker Sprowls Talks with Clearwater Marine Aquarium Scientists about Manatee Deaths and Red Tide**

*Boat tour with Clearwater Marine Aquarium scientists follows on legislative efforts to mitigate manatee deaths and red tide in Tampa Bay in 2021 Session*

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (August 10, 2021)** — Following on a successful legislative session with a strong natural resources agenda, Florida House Speaker Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor, today toured Tampa Bay with scientists from Clearwater Marine Aquarium to learn more about research on how to mitigate manatee deaths and the challenges of red tide algal blooms.

“The number of manatee deaths this year and the impacts of red tide on residents, tourism and the environment are devastating,” said Speaker Sprowls. “It’s critical we learn more about the issues and the challenges of current research to make informed decisions about how public policy and legislation can improve the situation.”

In this year alone, more than 880 manatees have died off the shore of Florida, breaking the previous statewide high of 830 in 2013. When first reports of manatee deaths started arriving during the legislative session, Speaker Sprowls led the Florida Legislature to appropriate \$8 million for manatee habitat restoration. Administered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the funding will be used to restore manatee access to springs and provide habitat restoration in manatee-concentrated areas.

“There is an unfortunate culmination of circumstances impacting manatees in Florida,” said Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute Executive Director, Dr. James “Buddy” Powell. “Our role as researchers is to provide the data so that policymakers are able to make informed decisions and act to save our beloved sea cow. Facilities like Clearwater Marine Aquarium are doing all we can to react to the

situation, we need help from the Florida Legislature to be proactive so we don't find ourselves in this dire state again."

In July, Clearwater Marine Aquarium announced plans to hasten the opening of a rehabilitation facility at its Tarpon Springs location this winter to help address the increasing number of distressed manatees in need of help.

Sprolows also heard from researchers about the challenges of red tide, a harmful algae bloom that negatively impacts natural resources in the Gulf of Mexico by replacing vital food sources, preventing sunlight from reaching seagrass and contributing to low oxygen dead-zones.

In fiscal year 2019-20, \$4.2 million in nonrecurring funds was appropriated to FWC for red tide research and management. Chapter 2019-114, Laws of Florida, appropriated \$3 million to FWC each year from 2019-20 through 2024-25 for FWC to award red tide mitigation project funding to Mote Marine Laboratory. In fiscal year 2020-21, FWC was appropriated two FTE positions and \$4.2 million in recurring funds for red tide research and management.

The Legislature appropriated \$10 million to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in nonrecurring funds for innovative technology projects to combat harmful algae blooms in fiscal years 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22. DEP was also appropriated \$10.8 million in nonrecurring funds for water quality enhancement and accountability, which includes funding to support the Blue-Green Algae Task Force and enhanced water quality monitoring, in fiscal years 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22.

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